

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No.: AA-82261

AK-040-EA00-014

Applicant: AT&T Wireless Services

Type of
Action: Communication Site Lease

Location: Sec. 5, SW¹/₄NE¹/₄, SW¹/₄, T. 13 N., R. 2 W., Seward Meridian

Prepared
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Preparing
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Date: August 3, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

AT&T Wireless Services (AWS) filed an application for a communication site right-of-way (R/W) on May 2, 2000 located within Fort Richardson in Sec. 5, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$, T. 13 N., R. 2 W., Seward Meridian (see attached maps) . The majority of the ancillary access road and power line follows the same route as the Chugach Electric power line R/W grant AA-70133.

The R/W will be for a period of 20 years, with the rights to renew, pursuant to Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and 43 CFR 2800.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

AWS proposes to construct a cellular telephone communication site between Eagle River and Ship Creek along the Glenn Highway. In January 1999, AWS contacted the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) about plans to construct a wireless communication site as well as three different site alternatives within Ft. Richardson. The COE referred AWS to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for a R/W grant because BLM has surface management responsibilities for the specific lands. Upon learning the site, road, and power line crossed BLM land, AWS submitted an application.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

The lands are included in the Alaska Southcentral Planning Area Management Framework Plan (MFP), dated March 1980. Activity Objective L-2 of the MFP states that “needs for rights-of-way are to be satisfied”.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

AWS has received a letter of Non-objection from the Army COE with specific terms and conditions associated with the Proposed Action.

AWS holds a current FCC license to operate a radio transmitting station.

A letter from the Chugach Electric Association (CEA) allows AWS to construct a power line under their power lines authorized under R/W grant AA-70133.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

AWS proposes to construct a communication site for cellular phone service between Ship Creek and Eagle River. A short access road and power line has also been proposed. The site, access road and power line are located east of the Glenn Highway and north of the Arctic Valley Road. A 20 year lease has been requested on .241 acres of land described as being within sec. 5, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$, T. 13 N., R. 2 W., Seward Meridian. The site, access road and power line are within the

Ft. Richardson military reservation boundary. A temporary construction area, 50' on either side of the road and 50' surrounding the pad, has also been requested. The temporary construction area will be used to park a crane. Construction will commence upon issuance of BLM authorizations and will take approximately 45 days to complete. Ft. Richardson has authorized AT&T's proposed site.

The site would consist of a single 65' tower, a 10' x 24' prefabricated metal sided equipment building located on a 35' x 35' gravel pad and a 15' x 35' gravel parking area. The site will be accessed via a 460' long by 8' wide (.08 acres) section of new access road connecting to a CEA electric distribution line R/W grant (AA-70133) and the Arctic Valley frontage road. A 2,353' long x 8' wide access road along the Chugach power line route, a new 240' long x 16' wide proposed access road leaves the main power line route and travels east to the communication site. Within the proposed access route to the communication site, an electric power line will be buried and a new 3,180' long x 30' wide area for an aerial electric power distribution line will also be required

The access road, pad and parking area will be constructed from gravel hauled to the site from a local mine site. A mid-size (30 ton capacity) dump truck will be used to haul the gravel. Brush and trees will be cleared and removed from the site prior to construction.

The equipment building will contain communications equipment, a computer and leak free epoxy Jar/cover seal type batteries. It will be supported on 8 inch diameter steel pilings driven 20' into the ground.. The pilings will be driven into the ground with a vehicle mounted hydraulic hammer. Twelve inches of gravel will be placed between the pilings. No excavation will be required. The equipment building will be hauled to the site on a flat bed trailer. A crane will lift the equipment building onto the pilings where it will be welded in place. The building will be painted forest green to help it blend in with the surrounding woods.

A 65' Valmont Microflect Monopole tower will be assembled on site and installed to support the antennas. Twenty inch diameter steel pilings will be driven 35' into the ground to support the antenna tower. Excavation will not be required. The pilings will be driven into the ground with a vehicle mounted hydraulic hammer. A crane will be used to lift the tower into position where it will be welded to the pilings. The tower will be painted dark brown to blend in with the surrounding woods. Three EMS Dual Pole Polarization diversity base antennas will be mounted at the top of the tower. The antennas will be installed close to the tower to minimize visual impacts.

The proposed access road will begin at the CEA electric line R/W approximately 1,300' from its intersection with the Arctic Valley frontage road.. It will be constructed with a D7 Cat and a front end loader. Approximately 12 to 18 inches of overburden will be removed. Overburden material will be bladed off and spread along the sides of the roadway. The excavation will be backfilled with approximately 18 inches of gravel. Grass will be planted on disturbed areas after construction has been completed.

Electric power to the site will be supplied from a new 3,180' long electric distribution line to be constructed from the Ft. Richardson transformer near the Arctic Valley frontage road entrance to the Glenn Highway. The line will consist of seven new 40' tall power poles. The poles will be placed in 6' deep holes excavated with a back hoe. Electric conductors and 12 pair telephone cable will be installed on the poles. The first and last pole are the only poles that have transformers with grounding. The industry standards for raptor protection have been considered in the design configuration of the poles. Information about the pole design can be found in case file AA-82261. Environmental impacts of the power line R/W have been previously addressed in EA-040-96-014 located in case file AA-70133 located at the Anchorage Field Office. CEA concurrence has been obtained to place the new power poles within their R/W. Within the road access to the communication site, a power line will be buried using a ditch witch.

Upon completion of construction, an 8' high chain link fence and gate will be installed around the building and tower for security purposes.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would result in denying the application for a communication site.

III. **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action:

Air Quality
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Cultural/Paleontological Resources
Environmental Justice

Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
Floodplains
Invasive, Nonnative Species
Native American Religious Concerns
Subsistence
T&E Species
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

B. Land Status:

Land affected by the Proposed Action includes lands withdrawn for the U.S. Army's Fort Richardson by Executive Order (EO) No. 8102, and Public Land Order (PLO) 2676. Cooperative Agreement AK-950-AGO-360 between the Alaska District COE and the BLM places the responsibility for authorizing R/W to the BLM. The Proposed Action must have concurrence from the Army.

C. Soils:

Soils in the area are of the orthod soil group and the typic cryorthods subgroup. The project area makes up approximately ten percent of the subgroup area and consists of soils which are very gravelly in hilly to steep terrain. Soils are shallow to very shallow, excessively drained and lie on scattered hilly moraines and short steep escarpments. Soils typically have a thin gray surface layer over a dark reddish brown to yellowish subsurface layer 6 to 12 inches thick overlying a very gravelly coarse sand or sandy loam. The soils have few limitations for construction of the access road and the cell phone tower pad.

D. Vegetation:

The site is located along the Glenn Highway between Eagle River and Anchorage, Alaska and is in the Cook Inlet-Susitna lowland area. On previously disturbed sites (R/W, abandoned road) bluejoint grass predominate, along with ferns, various forbs, and scattered willow/alder sapling regrowth. Vegetation in the relatively undisturbed area is composed of a paper birch/white spruce woodland with an understory of devil's club and bluejoint grass.

There are no sensitive or rare plant species known to occur in the area.

E. Wildlife:

The site of the Proposed Action and surrounding area supports a variety of animal species. Resident populations include moose, porcupine, snowshoe hare, microtine rodents and at least 40 species of resident and migrant land birds. Non-

resident species that have been seen include fox, coyote, wolf, lynx, brown bear and black bear. These animals move through the area, probably from the Chugach Mountains during seasonal changes and heavy snowfall. Many migrant birds, pass through the area during spring and fall migration, including several raptor and many neo-tropical species. Shrub and forest habitats provide nesting habitat for land birds and raptors, particularly Bald Eagles. There is one species of amphibian, the wood frog, that occurs in the area. There are no wetlands on the site of the Proposed Action. There are no threatened and endangered species in the area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Vegetation:

The proposed project would result in the loss of vegetation from the pad, parking area and access road. A small amount of vegetation would be covered by the overburden that would be spread along the sides of the roadway. The total area of lost vegetation would be less than .3 acres.

Areas disturbed, but not covered in gravel, would likely recolonize during the first few years in weed species, if not seeded with native plant species.

2. Wildlife:

There will be some loss, less than .3 acres of habitat for moose and nesting and migrant land birds involved in the clearing of the access road and the tower site. The Proposed Action will have minimal impacts on raptor species migrating and nesting in the area since it requires power lines to be constructed to raptor safe standards.

3. Visual Resources:

The general area has been previously disturbed and is in close proximity to a major highway. This area is managed under a Class III Objective. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

1. Vegetation:

There would be no impacts to vegetation since no disturbance would occur.

2. Wildlife:
Wildlife would not be impacted and natural processes would continue to occur.

3. Visual Resources:
Visual quality would remain unchanged with no intrusions.

A. Cumulative Impacts:
The Proposed Action will add to the development that is taking place in the Anchorage Bowl. Because of the size, location and low visibility of the site, the impact will be slight.

B. Residual Impacts:
Residual impacts would be the long term loss of vegetation and wildlife habitat.

C. Mitigation Measures:
Any reseeding or planting should be done with native plant species. Suitable species for this mesic site (not wet, not dry) include Tufted Hairgrass Deschampsia caespitosa, Bering Hairgrass Deschampsia beringensis, Red Fescue Festuca rubra, Bluejoint Reedgrass Calamagrostis, Polargrass Arctagrostis latifolia, and Alpine Bluegrass Poa are commercially available. Any other proposed species will require review by the Authorized Officer.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:
Donna Redding, Archaeologist
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